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# The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance

1950 to the Present

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xvi *Preface*

reporting, which seemed to me to be a useful rather than a harmful thing to do. Much has been written about secret activities in Laos and Vietnam that was true but also much that was exaggerated or untrue. The reports I have cited are among the accurate ones. Needless to say, none of this means that CIA has responsibility for this work, which is solely my own.

The reader will also note that occasionally I describe events without providing sources for my statements. In such cases, unless a public source is clearly implied, I am basing my account on what I learned from my personal involvement at the time, either on the scene or in Washington, where I was privy to reports sent in from the field or interviewed officers returning from there.

I also wish to call attention to one situation in which I am in the curious position of having to speculate and piece together a picture from limited fragments of information despite the fact that the country and activity were familiar to me from having worked there. I refer to Chapter V, "People's Counterinsurgency," which concerns the Meo resistance effort in Laos. Although much of that activity was intimately known to me from personal involvement from 1963 through 1966, I never became familiar with important aspects of the earliest phase dating from late 1960 and early 1961. Because the account I am able to give is clearly based on fragmentary information together with some inference and deduction, the reader may get the impression that I know more than I am telling. This is not the case. For better or worse, history for its own sake does not play any part in the lives of active operations officers in the CIA, and I never thought to delve into events of the years before I became involved. Clearly, at the time it never occurred to me that one day I would be writing a book on these matters and would regret my lack of curiosity.

It remains to acknowledge the help of many people whom I consulted in the course of writing this book. Certainly the person to whom my debt is greatest and who has helped me the most with his encouragement, his enthusiasm, his vast knowledge, and his impatience with error is Ambassador Robert W. Komer, now of the Rand Corporation, who served as head of CORDS in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968. From beginning to end of this lengthy enterprise he has been unfailingly helpful and willing to share his knowledge. I thank him for this essential help but hasten to add that I alone am responsible for the content of this work.

I also must acknowledge the good advice of Dr. Bernard Brodie of UCLA, Joseph J. Zasloff of the University of Pittsburgh, McAllister Brown of Williams College, Lewis J. Lapham, Stephen T. Hosmer, Jeanette L. Koch, Charles A. Mann, Dr. Patricia McCreedy, Dr. Charles Weldon, James Thomas Ward, George K. Tanham, William P. Bundy, Richard M. Bissell, Jr., and William Moss of the John F. Kennedy Library at Waltham, Massachusetts. All gave generously of their time and knowledge. Again, however, I am solely responsible for what has emerged.

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basis of a large national effort. The recurring pattern was unpremeditated and was a reflection of the fact that counterinsurgency was not the province of any established agency, that cut-and-dried advance formulas could not be devised for each situation but had to be worked out on the scene, and that CIA had both the motivation and the flexibility to experiment and improvise until some solution had been found, whereas the more conventional agencies were held more closely to fixed programs. On the other hand, CIA's improvisations were based on special local conditions, the cohesiveness of selected minority groups, and the like. They could not always easily be transformed into national programs.

A rather different initiative attempted by the CIA during this period brought some success but considerable trouble in its wake. The concept was that of answering VC terrorism in kind to produce a climate of insecurity in enemy-controlled areas and to capture or kill identified members of the VC organization. The program was called Counter-Terror Teams (CTTs), not a happy name, as the CIA was to find. The teams were organized at province level under the direct authority of the province chief. Recruitment criteria emphasized the qualities thought necessary for personal combat, training was rigorous with emphasis on leadership, initiative, and discipline, but the results were highly uneven. In some cases, disciplined and formidable units of six or a dozen men carried out carefully planned forays into enemy territory, capturing or killing identified local Communist figures. Sometimes they struck silently and at other times they made brief public appearances in a VC-controlled community. Here and there such raids had a startling if short-lived effect, and the programs spread until almost all provinces had a unit of this type.

In some provinces, however, control was inadequate and the quality of the recruits was poor. They might simply be used as bodyguards by the province chief or, what was worse, might indulge in petty gangsterism in friendly villages or serve as "enforcers" for the dominant local political group. The program, in fact, grew too fast for the existing control mechanism and was already headed for trouble when it struck a reef. Publicity on the CTTs began to appear in the U.S. press, emphasizing and exaggerating the lurid aspects of its work—silent assassination and terror in enemy-held territory. The publicity suggested and stated, in some cases, that the teams were instruments of generalized mayhem visited upon villagers in the enemy's territory. Before long the CIA began a reorganization and trimming of the effort which eventually transformed it into a different and more manageable instrument. The refurbished Counter-Terror Teams became the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs), which will be described more fully in due course.

The next experiment in this series was anointed with the curious title

of the Census/Grievance and Aspiration Program, usually shortened to the mysterious-sounding "Census/Grievance." Despite its title, it was not a program to identify popular grievances against the census. Rather it was intended to provide each participating province chief with a tool to establish a reliable village head-count that also identified the loyalties of the villagers while simultaneously checking on both corruption and on village aspirations—be it for a school, a market, a well, or similar small-scale public works. The census function was genuine, but it also provided a cover for interviews with each villager. Thus protected by the fact of universality, he could be asked delicate questions with some hope that he might tell the truth. The information was then collected and forwarded directly to a center at the province capital, skipping the intervening district office. There it was screened and distributed, with any information about corruption or village abuse going directly to the province chief. The work in the hamlet was performed by a resident selected and trained for that purpose. He remained in place permanently and sent periodic reports to his superiors.

This curious device was an expedient substituted for what should have been the normal functioning of local authorities—police and village councils. As was the case with all the cadre programs, it responded to the American sense of urgency about the need to take action immediately to avoid catastrophe, rather than patiently attempting what seemed the near-hopeless task of assisting the conventional arms of government to meet the demands of the crisis. When local conditions were right—a competent and interested province chief, adequate American advisory assistance, and so on—Census/Grievance was a useful adjunct of pacification, and particularly so in the intelligence it produced. It was, however, not a critical contributor to success or failure.

#### THE CONVENTIONAL PROGRAMS PUSH AHEAD

The cadre programs just described did not exhaust CIA's involvement in the layered growth of pacification, for it also worked in more conventional modes with focus on intelligence. The National Police had been reorganized after the collapse of the Diem regime. U.S. assistance no longer came from Michigan State University but from AID, with the exception of two areas where CIA was heavily involved. First was the expansion of the Police Special Branch (formerly the *Sûreté*) from an urban security police centered in Siagon to a nationwide service represented in each province capital from which it attempted intelligence collection on the Viet Cong in the countryside. (The Special Branch was responsible for internal security and the collection of intelligence against subversive organizations.) The program took several years to reach the

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goal of nationwide expansion contribution. The kind for well-trained officers which do not flower over

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